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II.—THE NEWSBOY

BY GEORGE A. HALL,
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In the program of restrictive legislation with respect to the employment of young children, attention seems to have been first directed toward the condition of children working in factories. As the public conscience became aroused and more intelligent, it was learned that the children working in mercantile establishments were also seriously in need of the law's protection. As a result, remedial legislation has followed in many of our states. Although more than thirty years have passed since the enactment of the first child labor law, the attempt to regulate street trading by children, is comparatively recent, as the passage of the first law specifically relating to newspaper selling, by the New York legislature, in 1903, indicates.

In view of the conditions surrounding newsboy life in our larger cities, uncovered during recent years, it is surprising that social workers, particularly, have been so tardy in recognizing the need of seeking protection for the street trader. Among those with first-hand knowledge of conditions, many claim that the evil effect upon young boys of street trading, is more serious by far than the effect of factory or mercantile occupations. In spite of this situation, only three states in the country—New York, Massachusetts and Wisconsin—and but a few scattering cities, including Washington, D. C., Cincinnati and Newark, have provided regulation.

The main objection to street trading for young boys is the almost certain impairment of morals, if this work is continued regularly for any length of time. This has been proved repeatedly by investigations conducted in New York City, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Buffalo and a number of other places. In support of this also, comes the strongest kind of testimony against such work for young boys, from superintendents of reform schools, juvenile court judges, and many others who come into close contact with newsboys. In attempting to secure legislation on this subject, the main

emphasis, therefore, should be placed on the moral issue. The effect upon the health, and the interference with schooling and play time of the adolescent child, are important reasons for regulating newspaper selling, but these alone would be insufficient to convince the average legislator that there is any harm in the free and easy outdoor life of the newsboy.

It is interesting to note that the 1910 English Royal Commission Report on the Poor Laws, discussing street trading, recommends that all such work be forbidden for boys until the age of seventeen and for girls until the age of eighteen years. Commenting on this radical recommendation—radical as compared with most newsboy laws in this country, which permit street trading for boys from ten years of age and upwards—the *London Economist* says: "We may well doubt whether any remedy can be too drastic for so great an evil as long as it be effectual. . . . Here are some 40,000 children who are being allowed to endanger their whole prospect of becoming decent citizens in order to earn prematurely a few pence which are, for the most part, ill spent. The work they do is not particularly useful, and might be done almost as well by adults or by the newspaper shops. Do not economy and efficiency, as well as humanity require that boys and girls who ought to be learning useful trades should be saved from such risk, to become better citizens and better wage earners?"

To those interested in securing for the first time some regulation of street trading, the question at once arises, whether to seek legislation to abolish entirely all such work for boys up to the age of sixteen (or perhaps fourteen), or whether to urge the adoption of such regulation as will permit newspaper selling by boys, say, twelve years of age and upwards, provided permits are granted to such boys for this work. The objectionable features of the work are so many that one feels that the entire elimination of it for boys under sixteen is the only ultimate end to be desired. As all advanced child labor legislation, however, has been the result of a process of enactments, year by year raising the standard, expediency may, in this matter, require that we be satisfied with perhaps a twelve-year-old minimum as a starting point.

A standard street trading law should, therefore, prohibit such work for boys under twelve years of age. If this prohibition could be made to affect all under fourteen, such a provision would be

distinctly superior. All street work—peddling, polishing shoes, etc.—should be included, unless already effectively covered by existing laws. Experience has shown that most legitimate street selling is over by eight o'clock in the evening. An 8 p. m. closing hour would, therefore, be desirable. Presenting proof of age as a prerequisite for obtaining a license for street trading is also strongly urged. As the parent or, as is frequently the case, the adult who distributes the newspapers, is the person responsible for the boy's engaging in this business, it would seem that punishment for a violation of the law should be imposed upon either of these rather than to fine the boy himself. This may be brought about through statutes holding adults responsible for the delinquency of juveniles. It is of the greatest importance that adequate enforcement be provided, otherwise it will soon become a dead letter. Local conditions will probably govern the selection of the law enforcing agency, but in most localities it will be found that a squad of truant officers, specially detailed for the purpose, is best adapted to this work.

When such cities as Paris and Berlin do entirely without newsboys—corner stands taking their places—it would seem that the least that can be done in American cities is to adopt some adequate system of regulation. In this connection, the opportunity presented in newspaper selling to give work to the aged and handicapped—who otherwise would have to be supported by private charity—should not be overlooked.